DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 085 TM 013 929

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TITLE	Recommendations for Improving the National Education Statistical Database. Summary. Improving Universe Data on Schools and School Districts.
INSTITUTION	Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC. State Education Assessment Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Center for Statistics (OERI/ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 86
CONTRACT	300-85-0146
NOTE	14p.; For related documents, see TM 013 919-920, TM 013 922-923, TM 013 925, TM 013 927-928.
AVAILABLE FROM	Council of Chief State School Officers, State Education Assessment Center, 400 North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001 (free).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Data Analysis; *Databases; *Data Collection; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; *Public Schools; *State Programs; Statistical Analysis
IDENTIFIERS	*Common Core of Data Program; Council of Chief State School Officers; Data Files; *Education Data Improvement Project

ABSTRACT

Recommendations resulting from the Council of Chief State School Officers' Education Data Improvement Project are summarized. This joint effort by the states and Federal government attempts to improve the quality and timeliness of data collected, analyzed, and reported by the United States Department of Education's Center for Statistics. The goals of the project are: (1) to describe the state collection of data elements contained in the common core of data; (2) to list those data elements that might be added to make the common core adequate and appropriate for reporting on the condition of the nation's schools; and (3) to make recommendations to states and the Center for Statistics for making the data more comprehensive, comparable, and timely. Part 1 presents general recommendations for improving the Center's common core of data. Of particular concern are recommendations to ensure that all states have a common understanding of Federal data requests and the resources to respond, and that states and the Federal government report in a timely manner. Part 2 presents recommendations specific to the public school universe file, which currently contains data from 87,000 schools and 16,000 districts. Part 3 presents recommendations for redefining several items critical for establishing comparable data. The final part lists data elements recommended by the Project for the school universe file. (SLD)

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State Education Assessment Center

Education Data Improvement Project

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Center for Statistics

September 1986

ED311085

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SUMMARY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE NATIONAL EDUCATION STATISTICAL DATABASE

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Improving Universe Data on Schools and School Districts

SUMMARY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE NATIONAL EDUCATION STATISTICAL DATABASE

September 1986

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Center for Statistics
U.S. Department of Education

Contract No. 300-85-0146

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INTRODUCTION

This document is a summary of recommendations resulting from the Council of Chief State School Officers' Education Data Improvement Project. The Project, funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Center for Statistics, is a joint effort of the states and the federal government to improve the quality and timeliness of data collected, analyzed, and reported by the Center. The Project, initiated by the Council as the first effort of its State Education Assessment Center, coincided with the Department of Education's extensive redesign of the national elementary/secondary education statistical data system. Improvement of the Center's common core of data collected annually from state education agencies, is the Project's primary goal.

The Center for Statistics and the states jointly share responsibility for a statistical system in education that is inadequate for today's needs. This project is one effort wherein they are working together to make the basic system efficient and effective.

The Project

The goals of the Project are to describe state collection of data elements currently contained in the common core of data and those that might be added to make the common core of data adequate and appropriate for reporting on the condition of the nation's schools, and to make recommendations to states and the Center for Statistics for making the data more comprehensive, comparable, and timely. During this first Project year, the focus has been on the school and school district universe files.

Methodology

The Education Data Improvement Project's data collection had two purposes: (1) to identify all states collecting specific data elements, and (2) to isolate discrepancies in ways different states define and measure various elements. Multiple iterations provided several points for validation and refinement of the responses by the states so that clear, concise recommendations could be made to the individual states for improving the national statistical data base.

The data collection process was multifaceted in that data were collected from several sources. Data were supplemented by individual and group interviews in areas needing further explication and by task forces and study groups in more complex areas. Over the several iterations, true state and national profiles emerged. Where discrepancies were found across a number of states, meetings were convened to arrive at consensus on specific data elements, definitions or measurement procedures. Where problems were found with a single or a few states, negotiations will establish crosswalks[1] between the state(s) and the Center for Statistics. Where states have better, more efficient definitions and procedures than currently used by the Center for Statistics, recommendations are made to change the national system.

This Report

The first year of the Project is described in a series of reports under the general title "Improving Universe Data on Schools and School Districts." The "Technical Report: Conceptual Framework" was the first in the series; "Development of a Shuttle for Verifying Data Elements Collected by State Departments of Education and reported to the U. S.

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[1] A crosswalk is a method for translating data collected by states into categories and definitions comparable to those proposed by the U.S. Department of Education's Center for Statistics. This allows states to maintain data collection procedures for their own purposes while providing a bridge to the national educational data system.

Department of Education's Center for Statistics" was the second; and "A Compendium: State Profiles of School and School District Universe Data" was the third. Several white papers complete the series, including:

- Summary: State Data Collection Practices on Universe Data Elements
- Data Elements on the School and School District Universe Files to Permit Sampling for National, Regional, and State Studies
- School and Student Classifications for Universe Data Files
- Variations in Definitions and Procedures for Student Counts: Enrollment, Fall Enrollment, Membership, and Average Daily Membership
- Collecting National Statistics on Dropouts
- Federal Program Information on School and School District Universe Files.

This document extracts from these reports and summarizes major recommendations to the Center and states for improving the national statistical data base for elementary and secondary education. Each is discussed in the specific documents noted in parentheses. Part 1 presents general recommendations for improving the Center's Common Core of Data. Part 2, presents recommendations specific to the universe file. Part 3 presents recommendations for redefining several terms critical for establishing comparable data. The final part lists data elements recommended by the Project for the school universe file.

PART 1. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS: AN IMPROVED NATIONAL ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION STATISTICAL DATA BASE

The recommendations in Part 1 address general processes for improving the national elementary and secondary education statistical database. The recommendations are directed to both the Center for Statistics and states, and suggest changes in federal and state data collection and reporting practices. Of particular concern are processes to ensure (1) that all states have a common understanding of federal data requests and the resources to respond, so that comparable data are reported across all states, and (2) that states and the federal government report in a timely manner.

1. The Center for Statistics should have responsibility to coordinate statistical data collection and reporting across the Department of Education.

2. The Center for Statistics should make improvement of the common core of data its first priority for funding and resource allocation in elementary and secondary education. The following recommendations are directed specifically at the public school universe component of the common core of data.

3. The public school universe file contains information about elementary and secondary schools and school districts reported to the Center for Statistics and verified as accurate by the state education agencies and is, thus, the official file. The Center for Statistics should use this universe file as the standard listing of all public schools, for reporting general descriptive education statistics to the nation, and for selecting samples of schools and school districts for Center for Statistics studies.

4. The Center for Statistics should design an improved public school universe file, develop new instruments, and implement the revised universe system in Spring 1988. State education agency reporting of all universe data should be rescheduled for March 15. Specific recommendations for revisions are presented in Parts 2, 3, and 4 of this report.

5. The Center for Statistics should develop and implement training in the new universe system, including new definitions and new data collection and reporting procedures, and make training available to both the Center for Statistics and state education agency personnel prior to implementation. New definitions, collection and reporting procedures, and accompanying guidelines should replace existing handbooks and be distributed as replacement documents. The training should be individualized to accommodate the varying state staff. Resources should be allocated within the Center for Statistics to support greatly expanded training responsibilities, including on-site and regional training for state personnel.

6. State education agencies should cooperate with the Center for Statistics by making training available to state personnel charged with collecting and reporting universe data.

7. State education agencies and the Center for Statistics should develop individual state data plans, including specifications for reporting each universe data element, with identifiable crosswalks between state data and the Center for Statistics-requested data where exact matches are not currently available.

8. The Center for Statistics should systematically implement improved monitoring of state universe reports. Specific problems of individual states should be identified and reported. State education agencies with collection or reporting problems should be provided with technical assistance and support to correct identified problems. The Center for Statistics' monitoring program should include continuing quality assessments of Center processes and reporting.

9. The Center for Statistics should provide special technical and financial assistance to those states required to modify and expand their existing data collection and reporting procedures to implement the Center for Statistics' new system. Where states cannot efficiently and in a timely manner meet the Center for Statistics' specifications, the Center should provide support to enable states to computerize data reporting. The Center for Statistics should allocate funds to support Center staff travel to states to provide training and technical assistance.

10. The Center for Statistics should allocate sufficient internal resources to maintain adequate and appropriate staffing for efficient, accurate, and timely processing and reporting of state-reported data. When possible, appropriate staffing should include, among the permanent staff, personnel with state education agency statistical data experience.

11. The Center for Statistics should make provisions for internships and for exchanges of state statistical data personnel between the Center for Statistics and states, as well as among states. The existing personnel exchange program should be enhanced and made more flexible for state sharing of staff resources. Internships should be a minimum of six months.

12. The Center for Statistics should maintain a revised universe system for five years without significant modifications, and then evaluate the new system, with changes phased in over a two-year period.

13. The Center for Statistics should establish formal national reporting schedules that do not vary from year-to-year and can be anticipated by states, Congress, and the general public.

Additional Considerations to Part 1

Apparent throughout this first year of the Project is the need to develop public credibility for education statistics collected and reported jointly by state education agencies and the Center for Statistics. While it is difficult to formulate specific recommendations, following are observations based on our experiences and suggestions to improve public perceptions and to provide a public statement of the state of the art of education statistical data.

Observations

1. There is no mechanism for regulation and accountability of national education statistical data collection and reporting, either by the Center for Statistics or state education agencies.

2. Training and experiences of data providers vary considerably across the states and within the Center for Statistics.

3. The importance of accurate and timely education data reporting is determined by the person responsible for compiling and reporting data at both the federal and state levels.

Suggestions

- Establish specific standards for data collection, management, and reporting, and set the guidelines for implementing those standards.

- Establish a program of formal recognition of states judged to meet professional standards.

- Identify specific professional knowledge, skills, and experiences desired for statistical data personnel at the national and state levels.

- Establish a program of formal recognition of Center for Statistics and state staff judged to have professional knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to apply standards for data collection, management and reporting.

PART 2. RECOMMENDATIONS: PUBLIC SCHOOL UNIVERSE FILE

Part 2 recommendations focus on general changes in the Center for Statistics' public school universe files. Currently, the Center for Statistics' Common Core of Data contains data from both public school (87,000 schools) and public school district (16,000 school districts). The recommendations address the structure and content of the universe files and the timeliness of reporting information to the public.

1. The school and school district files should be combined into one comprehensive universe file. (The schools should be nested within districts; district data should not be included on individual school files.)

2. The school universe file should include only elementary/secondary (PK-12) data.

3. Individual state universe reports should be submitted to the Center for Statistics by March 15. The Center for Statistics should estimate, from the prior year's file, data for those states not submitting timely reports. No reporting date should be missed waiting for individual state reports. However, the Center for Statistics should substitute actual state data as soon as it is available for subsequent reporting.

4. The Center for Statistics should use selected data from the March 15 report to project current year universe data for releasing descriptive information to states and the general public and for selecting samples by August 15. The individual elements of the Center for Statistics' projection model should be negotiated, state-by-state, and included in the individual state data plans.

5. The Center for Statistics should present actual prior year's data by November 15.

PART 3. RECOMMENDATIONS: DEFINITIONS OF SELECTED TERMS

If data are to be comparable across states, it is imperative that states and the Center for Statistics have a common understanding of elements within the reporting framework. This includes basic terminology such as school, public school, and nonpublic school. If states are not reporting on the same entities, then comparisons of states are inaccurate. Also, basic data elements must be computed the same way by all states for comparisons to be accurate. All states must include and exclude the same types of students or the numbers of students will be biased.

These recommendations present revised definitions of critical terms. Additional recommended definitions for universe terms are contained in the Project's white papers. No attempt is made in this summary report to present all revised definitions.

1. School

Institution which provides educational services:
- has one or more grade groups (PK-12) or ungraded
- has one or more teachers to give instruction
- is located in one or more buildings
- has assigned administrator

a. Local Public School

Elementary or secondary school:
- operated by a local public agency
- receives funds (directly or indirectly) from state education support formula
- governed by locally elected or appointed school board

b. State-Operated Public School

Elementary, secondary, or special school:
- operated by the state
- operated by a government agency within the state
- receives public funds as primary support
- may receive funds from state education support formula

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c. Federally-Operated Public School

Elementary, secondary, or special school:
- operated by the federal government
- receives federal funds as primary support

d. Nonpublic School

Elementary or secondary school:
- operated by an individual or nonpublic entity or
- operated by a religious entity
- not under public control
- can receive funds for special programs
- does not include home based schools or education

2. Head Count

Count of students registered in a school
- counted between the beginning of school and October 31
- adds new entrants
- does not subtract those leaving
- is unduplicated count of students within a school

3. Dropout

A student who leaves school
- leaves before graduation
- does not transfer to another full-time school or institution
- includes those who enter the military
- includes those who are expelled
- includes those who transfer to programs that do not qualify as elementary or secondary schools
- includes those who leave between terms
- excludes students who die
- excludes those who leave school temporarily
- excludes those who transfer to other public institutions with education programs (e.g., community colleges, mental or juvenile institution)
- occurs regardless of compulsory attendance age

PART 4. RECOMMENDATIONS: UNIVERSE DATA ELEMENTS

Following are specific data elements recommended for the school universe file. We recommend excluding all other currently collected data elements from the public school universe. Specific data elements are presented below with the level (school or school district) at which they are to be collected. Also, each data element is designated as "current" or "new." All new data elements have a date specified for adding to the Center for Statistics' data collection.

Data Element	Level	Status
GENERAL IDENTIFICATION		
1. FIPS/State Agency Number	District	Current
2. CS/School Identification Number	School	Current
3. Name of Agency	District	Current
4. Common Name of School	School	Current
5. Agency Mailing Address (Street/P.O. Box, City, State, Zip)	District	Current
6. Agency Telephone Number	District	Current
7. School Mailing Address (Street/P.O. Box, City, State, Zip)	School	Current
8. School Telephone Number	School	Current
9. School Type I		
Local Public School	School	New - 3/88
State-Operated Public School	School	New - 3/88
Federally-Operated Public School	School	New - 3/88
Other	School	New - 3/88
10. School Type II		
Regular	School	Current
Special Education	School	Current
Vocational Education	School	Current
Alternative	School	Current
Other	School	Current

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.	Type of Locale (Urban, Suburban, Rural, Mixed)	School	New - 3/88
2.	Head Count Free Lunch Eligible	School	New - 3/88
3.	Head Count Individual Education Plans (IEPs)	School/ District	New - 3/88
4.	Head Count Limited English Proficient Students	School	New - 3/90

STUDENT

1.	Fall Head Count (unduplicated) by grade (Pre-K-12) and ungraded	School	Current
2.	Head Count Sex by Race (not by grade)	School	New - 3/88
3.	Head Count Graduates	District	Current
4.	Head Count Dropouts	District	New - 3/89

PROGRAM

1.	Head Count Students Participating Chapter 1	School	New - 3/88

STAFF*

1.	Number Classroom Teachers	School	Current
2.	Number Instructional Personnel	District	Current
3.	Number of Administrators	School/ District	Current

*Definitions for data elements on staffing are still being developed at this writing.